

LOOKING BACK : REFLECTIONS OF A  
QUONDAM COLEOPTERIST

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Once an entomologist always an insect hunter. I caught the entomological 'bug' (if so blatant a tautology be permitted) as a young teenager. It all began with shell collecting along the *littoral* during a long stay on the Belgian coast in 1924-26; then I moved on to Switzerland — the fauna was prolific at 1100-1200 metres altitude in the lower Alps. I remember the jam jars and bottles filled with wall and green lizards, slowworms, salamanders and snakes, topped up with *alcool à brûler*, the badly-blown birds' eggs, insects of many orders pierced with thick pins from penny packets.

One day, however, a friend brought me an Elaterid, dull brown, with tufted pubescent patches of iridescent gold; on another occasion he arrived with a torpid *Procrustes coriaceus*, found under a snow-covered boulder: these beetles changed my collecting habits. Out went the discoloured reptiles, the oological relics, the Hemi-Homoptera, dragon flies and badly-sprung Lepidoptera. I wrote off for 10/-'s worth — a large sum for a schoolboy in those days — per 100 beetles from that most reliable firm, Watkins and Doncaster of the Strand, long since moved; Mr. Frederick Mett  wrote such polite and encouraging letters to youngsters. His catalogue was a treasure-house and joy to read. Of course, the beetles were not named nor labelled but the selection was catholic and included a *Carabus nitens* L.

Next, I persuaded my parents to send out a copy of Rev. C. A. Hall's *Common British Beetles* and later, W. E. Sharp's *Beetles of our Countryside* (1/6d. from Selfridge's bargain book counter.) Coleopteromania had taken off! I came back to England with hundreds of beetles in cork-lined cigar boxes, still badly pinned or seccotined to strips of postcard; at least they were locality-labelled and I kept a detailed record book of captures. I was learning; my first venture into print, *Quelques Insectes de Leysin et de ses Environs*, had already appeared in the local newspaper in 1930. My insect boxes were viewed with some suspicion by Customs and Excise at Dover when I returned home in 1931. They were doubtless looking out for the pernicious Colorado beetle.

Where the Coleoptera were concerned my working life seems to have been divided into four parts.

I recall being gently quizzed by Sir Gavin de Beer about my aspirations when I first presented my student's ticket at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, before being passed on to Dr. K. G. Blair (whose interest in my work over the years was un-failing) and the almost limitless collections in the basement of the

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Department of Entomology — I was temporarily studying the British Scarabaeidae; the rest was yet to come. I had begun to specialize.

In the early 'thirties I prepared a typescript monograph, *De Carabis*, illustrated, 332 pages long, neatly bound in printed boards: it got no further, though I have it to this day. One of my children, years ago, had obviously found the volume, plastering its pages with scribbled comments, such as (referring to *Carabus depressus* Bonelli, v. *intermedius* Heer: Heer, *Kaefer Schweiz.*, II:25. Switzerland),

“55      Not very good.”  
100

This merits an up-to-date comment because in September 1983, my wife in tidying a rosebed in my son's garden at Middle Old Park, Farnham, Surrey, called out to me,

“I've just caught a big beetle for you.”

“Where is it?”

“I put it in the finger of my gardening glove.”

Out came the entomological forceps, kept permanently on my person, and I hauled into view an example of *Carabus monilis* F.: what a pleasure! The last time I had seen one was over half-a-century ago in Finchley, N.3. and another in a carrion trap in July 1936 (4). In passing I add that *Carabus granulatus* L. was commonly running around the grounds at Jodrell Hall (Terra Nova School), Cheshire, up to 1972. I had also fished out of the school swimming pool on more than one occasion *Cychrus rostratus* L., *Serica brunnea* L. and a *Leipus nebulosus* L. in 1970.

There followed a three year investigation on necrophagous Coleoptera, culminating in a long paper, published in 1941 (4).

Then I turned to the water beetles. There was a series of papers, with one exception (3), to be found in the pages of the *Entomologist's monthly Magazine*, 1938-43. I remember, with chagrin at the time, showing my collection to the Keeper of Entomology, B.M.N.H., and his pointing instantly to an example of *Hydroporus melanarius* Sturm mixed up with a number of *H. memnonius* Nic. How could I have made so stupid a mis-identification!

For a while in the 'forties, academic preoccupations intervened, and it was resolved, with the publication of (5), without much fervour to give up beetles: but the lure was irresistible; *Coleoptera*, *Cerambycidae* fascinated me. The cycle of research, hunting and collecting, travelling and recording had recommenced. In 1949, on a refresher course at Oxford University, all my spare time was spent in the Hope Department of Entomology going through their material. I experienced a certain wry satisfaction in re-determining a specimen of *Stenocorus meridianus* L. lying amid a run of *Rhagium bifasciatum* F. in Commander J. J. Walker's collection of Coleoptera. That year, too, R. W. Lloyd and I spent a day collecting

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in Delamere Forest, Cheshire, hunting particularly for *Saperda scalaris* L., of which we found many larvae, pupae and a dead imago. I remember admiring Mr. Lloyd's mobility and agility in clambering over gates and fencing, despite his artificial limb — he had had his accident climbing in the Himalayas in his youth. On our drive to Delamere he handed me a small pocket storebox.

"I brought this present for you," he said. "Walter, my chauffeur, beat a number off pine<sup>1</sup> branches for me in Moccas Park, Herefordshire, a year or so ago."

He made no further comment, so I opened the box. It contained to my amazement a neatly-ticketed *Pyrrhidium sanguineum* L. I thought back to my papers (6, 7) and wondered.

I had lamented in 1947 my failure to trace *Judolia cerambyciformis* Schrank (8), last heard of in 1917 (2); four years later in July I found one morning a dead specimen caught in a spider's web in my outhouse at Jodrell Hall; nor was that all: in July 1952 two live examples were seen on *Heracleum* in the school grounds; nor was that all. On July 13th, 1952, at dusk on a very humid and sultry evening, a *Prionus coriarius* L. flew through the lighted open windows of our sitting room, so confirming an old Cheshire record and my comments in (8, 9).

Reluctantly I finally ended my work on the British Longhorn beetles; to complete the break I avoided writing a note on the above occurrences. It is now, after thirty-five years' silence, that I make these observations, hoping that they may yet be of interest to current observers. I have my beating tray, fifty years old, its calico (if stained) as good as new. In June 1982 I unearthed it to see if anything was about on the hawthorns down our lane; indeed, yes: the ubiquitous *Grammoptera ruficornis* F., inexplicably omitted from Linssen's (1959) *Beetles of the British Isles*; in June 1983 — the May trees were again very late in blossom this year — it was around in fewer numbers. The only other Longicorn noticed since our retirement to Great Dunmow, Essex was a *Clytus arietis* L. on a windowsill.

In the last decade here, Coleoptera have been few and far between: a *Pyrochroa coccinea* L. was found crawling along the long grass in our lane in August 1973; the occasional *Tenebrio molitor* L. exits from the kitchen cupboards; *Notiophilus*, *Amara*, *Agonum* and *Harpalus* spp. occur sparingly in the garden, and the common *Sitona* has invariably alighted on my sleeve at least once each summer. Wild parsleys and *Heracleum* grow in profusion in the hedge-rows, but not a beetle to be found save *Rhagonycha fulva* Scop., a common Cantharid that is becoming scarcer each year. *Cionus scrophulariae* L. was quite common on the *Buddleia*, hidden in the leaf axils, but that has now disappeared.

<sup>1</sup>Was 'pine' perhaps a slip on Mr. Lloyd's part? *Pyrrhidium* is invariably found on oak, at all events at Moccas. — EDS.

One Friday morning in August 1982, however, a large *Dorcus parallelipedus* L. came crawling along the carpet in the living room towards me. This was little short of astounding; I do not know where it came from, nor how it had got into the house. I looked it up in the *Victoria County History of Essex*, I: found "in the 19th-20th centuries, Colchester." I showed it to my grandson.

"Ugh! Does it bite?"

Some other recent sightings:— *Strangalia maculata* Poda and *Gyrinus natator* L.<sup>2</sup> on Forestry Commission land near Robertsbridge, Sussex, in June 1978; in the sand dunes at Palling, Norfolk, in June 1981, *Opatrum sabulosum* L., a beetle I had never found before.

In July 1981 we were staying with our son in the hills above Farnham. The hedges there grow Hogweed in abundance — a plant I cannot resist examining, just in case . . . and, on the nearest Umbellifer, a few yards from the drive, I found, for the first time ever, *Strangalia melanura* L., ♂♂ and ♀♀, which had always eluded me in whatever county I had formerly collected. *Strangalia maculata* Poda, one of my favourite Cerambycids, was there in some numbers as well, in flight and settling on the Hogweed. Last year both species were again in evidence during July, together with *Malachius* and *Ædemera* beetles.

The under-mentioned data came in [*vide* Bibliography (10, 11, 12)] after the publication of (9); there are no doubt many fresh records since then:—

*Asemum striatum* L. Wales: FT; Scotland: AM RE; and its ab. *agreste* F. Wales: FT; Scotland: PM; *Rhagium bifasciatum* F. Wales: CM; Scotland: B LL; and the aberrations *bistrinotatum* Pic England: ML; *latefasciatum* Pic England: ML (a near form); *mediofasciatum* Pic England: ML; *gravei* Hub. England: ML; *ictericum* Schleicher England: ML; *R. inquisitor*, L. Scotland: CT LA; *Stenocorus meridianus* L., ab. *chrysogaster* Schrank Wales: CR; *Strangalia quadri-fasciata* L. Scotland: AM M; *S. maculata* Poda Scotland: B; and the aberrant forms *binotata* Muls. England: CU; *disconotata* Pic Wales: MN; *undulata* Muls. Wales: MN; *Leptideella brevipennis* Muls. Scotland: LA (imported); *Aromia moschata* L. Scotland: AS LA (imported) PN; *Clytus arietis* L. Scotland: BW; *Lamia textor* L. Scotland: AM (doubtful); *Acanthocinus aedilis* L. Scotland: AY RF (both imported).

County symbols follow (1).

<sup>2</sup>This was doubtless *G. substriatus* Steph., the true *natator* L. having been quite recently shown to be exceedingly rare in Britain and not yet known from S. England (Angus & Carr, 1982, *Ent. Gaz.*, 33: 223-9). EDS.

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COLEOPHORA SERPYLLETORUM HERING IN KENT. — Whilst operating a light on the sea wall near Sandwich on 3.viii.1982, I retained a rather strikingly-marked coleophorid. It was a female and I later submitted the specimen to the British Museum where Dr. J. D. Bradley kindly made a genitalia preparation from which Mr. R. W. J. Uffen was later able to determine the species as *Coleophora serpylletorum*. This is a species associated with *Thymus* and was only previously known from North Wales and West Cornwall. The Atlas of the Kent Flora does not record Thyme from this area and whether this specimen was perhaps introduced into a local garden or whether on migration, remains a mystery. — N. F. HEAL, Fosters, Detling Hill, Nr. Maidstone, Kent.